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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER OSKANIAN

Classified By: Amabassador Marie Yovanovitch. Reason 1.4 (B/D)

¶1. (C) On November 14, Ambassador had lunch with former Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian and discussed a range of issues.

¶2. (C) FOREIGN POLICY: On Nagorno-Karabakh, Oskanian said that, reading between the lines of the Moscow Declaration, it appears there were "huge" disagreements between the parties. He noted that the Madrid Principles are not mentioned, and referred to so indirectly as not to be meaningful. He concluded that while the outlines of a deal are clear, he doesn't see an agreement emerging now. Oskanian added, however, that he is optimistic that unlike his predecessor, President Sargsian is capable of concluding a deal, because he is more flexible. On Turkey, Oskanian said that there should be more progress, including visible progress. He does not think that an agreement is likely in the near future, because the Turks will insist on linking the issue to a Nagorno-Karabakh settlement.

¶3. (C) INTERNAL POLITICS: Oskanian lamented the downward trends in democracy and human rights. He observed that former President Kocharian "did the same thing," but that the situation is worse now. Oskanian said he did not know whether Sargsian would cobble together a political solution to resolve the issue of the March 1 detainees, such as an amnesty. He noted, however, that he was familiar with Sargsian's thinking in March when they were in meetings together, and at that time, Sargsian wanted "to do something about this."

¶4. (C) KOCHARIAN: Oskanian said that Oskanian is interested in entering politics, but is working towards the parliamentary elections in 2010 at which time he might start his own party. That said, the timing of his political debut depends on developments in Armenia and if there is an opening, he will seize it. He is talking to party leaders and others and says there is interest in working with him. Oskanian refuted the rumors circulating that former President Kocharian wants to stage a political comeback in the near future and that Oskanian is helping him. He said that he can't imagine Kocharian as Prime Minister, since he would then be number two. He added Kocharian is doing a lot of traveling abroad now, and has not mentioned any such plans.

¶5. (C) DEMOCRACY IN ARMENIA: In the meantime, Oskanian said that next week he will launch a book of his speeches, given during his ten years as Foreign Minister. He is also working on a book of memoirs and he has established a new foundation, Civilitas, which will provide analyses, host conferences, and implement development projects. Oskanian said the foundation's work will be focused on promoting democracy and human rights. He noted that without improving good governance and raising the human capacity in Armenia, the country will never be able to really progress. He offered the rare view in Armenia that Armenia's economic development depends on democratic improvements, including an independent and professional court system, freedom of speech,

and freedom of the press. "The Armenian people are best when they are free," he concluded.

¶ 6. (C) He added that once Armenia starts to emerge as a democracy it will become truly successful in engaging the Armenian diaspora around the world. Oskanian claimed that many of the most talented and wealthiest diaspora don't identify with the Armenia of today. When he was Foreign Minister, he made a special effort to reach out to this group, but they want to see concrete changes before they invest in Armenia. He said that the diaspora that is supporting Armenia now are individuals who will always support Armenia, although he said even among this group, there are those that have become so frustrated that they have stepped aside.

¶ 7. (C) COMMENT: Notwithstanding Oskanian's rebuttal, the Armenian political class remains convinced that Oskanian is working politically with Kocharian, and we strongly suspect that to be correct. Oskanian is a brilliant, experienced, and wily diplomat, and probably not above a bit of dissimulation in the service of his goals. On Turkey and NK, his public and private comments over recent months have often been quite skeptical and had a tinge of sour grapes. There may well be an element of professional jealousy and resentment that after Oskanian's long years of hard work (representing the uncompromising President Kocharian), his successor, Nalbandian, may get to be the one in the Foreign Minister's seat at the moment of breakthroughs on Turkey and NK.

YOVANOVITCH